Oral History

of

Robert Fields

Interviewed by:

Jerry C. Grover

Name: Robert C. Fields
Date of Interview: February 1, 2004
Location of Interview: Tigard, Oregon
Interviewer: Jerry Grover
Years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 37 1/2

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Range survey crew at Sheldon Antelope Range; refuge manager trainee at National Bison Range; assignment manager at Charles M. Russell; Project Leader at Fort Niobrara Refuge, J. Clark Salyer, and Klamath Basin Refuges; and in Portland as the Refuge Supervisor for California and Nevada refuges including the Klamath Basin Complex.

Most Important Projects: Garrison Diversion Project; Klamath Basin Refuges, Central Valley Project Improvement Act.

Colleagues and Mentors: Ben Hazeltine, Charles Rouse, C.J. Henry, Casey Jones, Fred Staunton, Dave Hickock, Marv Kaschke, Bob Burkholder, Forrest Carpenter, Joe Mazzoni, Forrest Cameron, Mike Nunn, Homer McCullum, Richard Voss, Merrill Hammond, Ed Smith, John Carlson, Jim Gritman, Larry Debates, John Doebel, Gray Kramer, Rick Coleman, Gary Zahm, Clark Bloom, Tom Charmley, Joel Miller, Jim McKevitt

Most Important Issues: Range management and surplus animal disposal issues at Ft. Niobrara; Klamath Basin, dealing with Bureau of Reclamation, local irrigation disstricts, and farmers who leased land on Tule Lake and Lower Klamath; water rights at Klamath; Pacific Power Line; steel shot versus lead shot, implementing the Central Valley Project Improvement Act

ABSTRACT: Robert Fields grew up in a rural area east of Olympia, Washington. There he would hunt, fish and become interested in the outdoors and wildlife. While in college he discovered the major of Wildlife Management/Conservation and started taking courses in his second semester of college. He took the civil service exam and began his career with the Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Sports Fisheries and Wildlife, in the National Wildlife Refuge System. He started with his refuge career in 1958 but was interrupted by a stint in the Army. He talks about the various locations he worked, people he worked with, projects and issues, and how things have changed since he first started working the Service. His journeys took him from the mid-continent wetlands to the west coast in a variety of managerial positions dealing with big game, range management, wetlands management and waterfowl issues that eventually led him to be the NWR Supervisor of the Klamath Basin and California/Nevada National Wildlife Refuges. He retired in January of 1995.

Bob & June Fields - 2012

THE ORAL HISTORY

Jerry: This is Jerry Grover, a retired Fish & Wildlife Service Ecological Services & Fishery Program supervisor in the Portland Regional Office. I'm doing an oral history today with Bob Fields regarding his career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The purpose of this interview is part of a program to preserve the heritage and culture of the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service through the eyes of its employees. It's February 1, year 2004. Bob would you, for the record, would you state your name, birth place and your birth date?

Bob: My name is Bob Fields but my official name is Robert C. Fields. I was born on July 13, 1936 in Olympia, Washington, and I was raised in a little town just east of Olympia called Yelm.

Jerry: Bob what got you interested in this area of conservation, Fish and Wildlife Management?

Bob: Well when I was a kid growing up we lived out in a rural area and I always hunted and fished and had a .22 rifle and shot everything that moved, which I'm not so proud of now. When I was in early years in high school I got involved in a group called Washington State Junior Sportsmen Council, and got interested in some of those kinds of things. I remember going to camp on Orcas Island in the early 1950's. When I graduated from high school in 1954 I went to Washington State College, it's Washington State University now. I was going to be an engineering major. That worked just fine until I took my first math course and figured out that I didn't know very much about mathematics. So I was kind of depressed and laying there one night on my bunk thumbing through the college catalogue, and low and behold here's this major in Wildlife Management or Wildlife Conservation. And it gave the name of Helmet K. Buchner at Washington State to go over and talk to. So I thought, 'WOW, this is a profession!' I had NO idea. So I went over to talk to Dr. Buchner and he told me about what was involved with the major and suggested I take his first course in Principles of Wildlife Conservation. So I signed up for that my second semester in college. The textbook he used was Durward Allen's book *Our Wildlife Legacy*. I was so enchanted with Dr. Buchner and what Durward Allen had to say, I just really clicked with it and I thought this is where my future is, and so I declared my major in Wildlife Conservation. They had two programs at Washington State, one was Wildlife Management and one was Wildlife Conservation. The reason I took Wildlife Conservation was because it was easier, you didn't have all the strict scientific courses and it gave you more flexibility for electives. Being the kind of student I was, I thought 'well if it's easier, it's got to be better.' And it fit my agenda quite well because it gave me an opportunity to take the wildlife management courses I wanted and also to take elective courses that I was interested in.

Jerry: Did the school, the University or State College at that time, did they sponsor summer work internships, what did you do in the summers between semesters?

Bob: The first summer I worked for the Forest Service out of Packwood, Washington. I started out as a fire lookout and that didn't appeal to me very much. There was a guy who wanted to be a lookout and he came off the trail crew. I signed up for the trail crew and worked in the Goats Rocks Wilderness Area relocating the Cascade Crest Trail. Between my sophomore and junior year I worked for the Washington Department of Game at the Sinlahekin Game Range up in north central Washington. I worked with a couple of biologist just doing vegetative surveys and then we went down in the Blue Mountains and did some more, primarily vegetative surveys with transects for elk and deer use. And then in my third year I took a break from that and worked as a boat dock hand and speed boat driver on Wallowa Lake in north eastern Oregon and that's where I met June. That was the best decision I ever made.

Jerry: Her maiden name was?

Bob: June VandeBrake and she was from Thorp, Washington, a little town in central Washington. We were both juniors at Washington State but didn't know each other until we got to Wallowa Lake. She was a home economics major in dietetics and was a waitress at the lodge and I worked at the boat dock renting boats. They had a speed boat that we gave people rides around the lake, so it was kind of an interesting summer. She made all the money and I had all the fun.

Jerry: Back to school, you graduated in…?

Bob: We both graduated in 1958 and then I went to work. We didn't marry until November of that year. Earlier in 1958 I took the Federal Service Entrance Exam, and now everybody has to have a score of about 104 to even be looked at. I think my score was something like 87. But that was back in the days before grade creep, and so I got a notice after taking the test that I was to go to an interview for a job. I went up to Turnbull Refuge in Cheney, Washington, which is about oh 50, 60 miles north of Pullman. The manager there was Rogers, and I think his name was Bill but I'm not sure, William Rodgers, but it's Dick Rodgers' father. Now Dick Rodgers is retired from the Fish and Wildlife Service, he had been manager down at Finley Refuge; he'd been in the Regional Office and is a very well-known and respected person. Dick's dad is the one who interviewed me back in 1958 and Dick always said that his dad didn't make many mistakes but approving me for being hired was probably one of them!

Jerry: I see you and Dick have some friendly banter. But that was your introduction into the United States Fish and Wildlife Service or at that time, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife.

Bob: Right, and upon graduation I had a job. I was to report to Lakeview, Oregon, and work on a range survey crew where we were doing a vegetative analysis on the Sheldon Refuge; it was called Sheldon Antelope Range at that time.

Jerry: That was before they added Hart Mountain?

Bob: They were separate refuges. Sheldon was managed by Ben Hazeltine and Hart Mountain was managed by Bob Watson. Sheldon's headquarters was out on the refuge at the Little Sheldon Headquarters, and Hart Mountain headquarters was out at the Hart Mountain Refuge. Our office was in Lakeview where I worked. My first supervisor was Charles Rouse. He was several years older than I was for sure; everybody was older than I was at that time. But Charlie had been around a long time. He worked at the Wichita Mountains NWR (National Wildlife Refuge). He had been a biologist and came into the service in, I think, when it was still Biological Survey before 1941, in the late 1930's.

Another colorful person, who I associated with at that time, was Ock Demming, he was the biologist out at Hart Mountain and Sheldon refuges. He had been a CCC person and came into the Bureau of Biological Survey after the CCC Program in the late 1930's.

Jerry: These are all people with your first job out of Lakeview?

Bob: Ock Demming had worked several places before, I don't know exactly where, but he ended up being the biologist at Hart Mountain and Sheldon. But he came into the Fish and Wildlife Service shortly after the year I was born

Jerry: It sounds like you didn't get bugged by the military; it was right at the end of the Korean War when you graduated from high school. You didn't have any reserve time or military time?

Bob: When I went to work for the service I was 4-F, I had a hernia and so I wasn't too worried about military service. And in November of 1958, June and I got married in Ellensburg, Washington and she came down to Lakeview with me. And sometime shortly after that I had a problem with that hernia and had to have it operated on and corrected.

Of course the military at that time wanted you to go in for a physical every year, so I went in for another physical and they said, "Hmm, you look pretty good. We want you to report for active duty on the day before Thanksgiving in 1959." So that's what I did. I went into the Army, drafted in, reported to Fort Ord in November 1959 and did my basic training there. I ended up, through kind of a fluke, finding out about a job down at Hunter Liggett Military Reservation in wildlife work. I interviewed for that job with the military officer who was in charge of the wildlife program, got the job, thought I was going to be assigned there and then they said, "Well you can't go directly there because you have to have a MOS, a Military Operation Specialty and we don't have one for wildlife." So they sent me to clerk typist school. In the meantime June moved down to Seaside, California. After clerk typist school, I then went to Hunter Liggett. I was there for almost two years working on a managed deer hunting program. We raised pheasants, I worked with a Predator and Rodent Control guy hunting mountain lions, trapping bobcats, and just generally had a hell of a good time for military service. So I served two years, three months, and three days.

Jerry: And you mustered out of Hunter Liggett?

Bob: Mustered out of the Army at Hunter Liggett in February of 1962. I was assigned to go to the National Bison Range in Montana. Originally I had been assigned to go to Hart Mountain, but I got caught up in late 1961 in

the Berlin crisis and everybody in the military was extended. I had to tell the Service I didn't know when I was getting out, so I didn't go to Hart Mountain. And I was to get out in November but I didn't get out until February, went to the Bison Range and that was probably a good stroke of business.

Jerry: And what were your primary duties there?

Bob: I was a refuge manager trainee.

Jerry: A GS…?

Bob: Five. No, excuse me, I was a GS-7. I had experience and I had time in grade so I transferred to the Bison Range as a GS-7. My job was, like I said, a refuge manager trainee so I did a little bit of everything. I did quite a bit of work with photography, photographed a lot of plants and animals and left a lot of pictures there for the refuge. But I also was pretty well versed in range management. That was one of my major thrusts in college and what I had worked at when I was in Lakeview, so I helped with a lot of their vegetative surveys. But I just generally got acquainted with what it was like to work on a National Wildlife Refuge.

Jerry: What were the issues that were facing the refuge at that time you were there?

Bob: Well you know that was back in probably the good ole days. C.J. Henry was the refuge manager. He was another manager that came into the Service in the late 1930's. When I came in 1958, I came at a time that a lot of the managers and biologists who came into the Service in the late 1930's, as the result of J. Clark Salyer's thrust and acquisition and expansion of the National refuge system, were retiring. They hired a lot of people in the 1930's. In the 50's, those people had 20, 25 years of experience and were really the experienced managers. I got to know some of these people and C. Jerry Henry was one of them. His first job was at Lower Souris Refuge in North Dakota, which I subsequently became the manager of but that's a story for a little later on.

Jerry: Was there another difference too at that time Bob, that a lot of those folks that in the '30's and early '40's that were managers, were also without college degrees? Seems to me as I recall from doing interviews with other folks that there was a wave of new people coming into the Fish & Wildlife Service with Bachelor of Science degrees now required to qualify for some of these positions? Were you among that group?

Bob: I just had a Bachelor's of Science. C. J. Henry was a college graduate and my first boss, Charlie Rouse was also a college graduate. I did know some of the other folks who had not completed college and were working with the Service. But work at the Bison Range at that time was pretty routine. Some of the problems were invasive species like goatweed and those sort of things. We had a disposal program at that time where we shot excess deer and elk and disposed of them through the school lunch program. So it was a pretty exciting time; it was a great time to get started in the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Jerry: Were there any bison on this range, you talk about plants and deer?

Bob: Oh yeah, we had about 300 bison and the herd was intensively managed with a roundup every year. We sorted out the ones to dispose of and they were all disposed of at that time by butchering. We shot them in a slaughterhouse and butchered the meat and then the meat was sold at auction.

Jerry: Okay after the Bison Range, Bob, what was your next assignment?

Bob: I went to the Bison Range in February of 1962 and I left there in November of 1963. I transferred to the Charles M. Russell Game Range in Lewistown, Montana. My job was the Assistant Manager on the West Unit at what was called the Slippery Ann Game Station, which was about 75 miles north of Lewistown right on the Missouri River. The West Unit was nearly 100 miles long and encompassed about half a million acres.

Jerry: What was your grade at that time?

Bob: I transferred there as a GS-9. By this time we had one son, who was born while we were in the military. Ray was our youngster. He was born in September of 1960 in King City, California. But while we were at Slippery Ann from November of '63 until July of '65, another son, Bruce, was born in Lewistown in November of 1964.

But this was quite a remote location and it was a real experience. There was one maintenance man, Casey Jones, who had been around a long, long time. He worked at Red Rock Lakes back in the '50's and then transferred to the Fort Peck Game Range, the original name until it was

changed to the Charles Russell Game Range. He and I and our families were the only ones that lived out there on the station on a permanent basis. The manager at that time was Fred Staunton, who started back in the '30's also. He was one of the fathers of the Wetlands Program, while he was at Waubay Refuge, South Dakota, in the 1950's. He saw the need to have some kind of a program to stop the Department of Agriculture from draining all those wetlands, and Fred Staunton was one of the early people who worked on that. The assistant manager was a fellow by the name of Dave Hickock, who worked for the Service for a while and then went on to Alaska and worked with, boy I'm not sure, but I think it was The Arctic Research Institute in Alaska.

Marv Kaschke was at Charles Russell at that time. I replaced Marv at Slippery Ann but Marv was still on staff as a range specialist. He was a real source of knowledge. Bob Burkholder transferred in from Alaska as a pilot biologist; Lloyd Ramelli another old timer was there; Joe Mazzoni came in and was there about a year and a half as Assistant Manager after Dave Hickock. So Charles Russell experience was really great.

Jerry: You're kind of listing a who's who, Bob, of people who that have ended up in the Pacific Region's hierarchy of managers.

But what was your job at Slippery Ann, I mean what were you doing, you and the maintenance man out there?

Bob: Well my job was the management of the west unit. I was in charge of issuing grazing permits and just overseeing the whole thing. We had a major flood in 1964, when the Missouri River flooded and caused extensive damage, washed out a lot of our roads, bridges and farm ground. We had some farming tracts where we did cooperative farming. Those were pretty well devastated. After the flood we did a lot of reseeding of all the bottom lands; I was the only person that could fly with Burkholder in the back of an airplane and dump sweet clover seed out a side door without getting airsick. So that was one of my jobs (chuckling.) But it was a great experience. The winters were severe, we were out there on our own, June and I and the boys were living next door to Casey and Vernadine Jones and their kids and it was just a wonderful experience.

Jerry: How long were you there?

Bob: I came there in November, moved into the house on the day President Kennedy was shot in 1963, and left in July of '65.

Jerry: When you left in July of '65, where'd you go after that?

Bob: I went to my first job as a Project Leader at Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in Valentine, Nebraska. It was a buffalo and longhorn cattle refuge and it also had elk and other wildlife, but the primary emphasis there were buffalo and longhorn cattle. The longhorn cattle have since been removed to a Nebraska State Park. Fort Niobrara was in Region 3, and the Refuge Supervisor at that time was Forrest Carpenter. My immediate supervisor was Ed Smith, who finished his career out in Region 1 as a Refuge Supervisor.

Jerry: Was that a promotion for you Bob?

Bob: Yes. That was a GS-11. We lived on the refuge in refuge housing and that's the only refuge I've ever lived at where the community really supported you. The day we moved in, there were people from town who came out and welcomed us. It was because it wasn't a controversial refuge. The controversy that had been there had been taken care of. They let people cut hay on the refuge. I replaced Howard Woon, who had moved to Minneapolis to work in the Job Corps Program.

It was a good job. I had a small staff. Forrest Brooks was my administrative assistant and clerk, and cowboy. James Vaughn was maintenanceman and excellent animal authority and cowboy. He was born and raised in the Nebraska Sandhills working with cattle and horses all his life. Joe Tinkler was the maintenance mechanic who grew up in Brooklyn, NY. We were the four permanent staff. Larry Vaughn, Jim's son, was a temporary worker. You were riding horses and chasing buffalo and rounding up longhorn cattle and all these sort of things. We instigated a new program that was actually new to the Fish and Wildlife Service. We set up a program where we sold buffalo by live auction rather than butchering them. At Wichita Mountains, Julian Howard was manager and Joe Mazzoni was manager at the Bison Range, and they ended up eventually doing the same kind of programs.

Jerry: Now that was a pioneering effort. What was the designation of these animals, just for domestic herds?

Bob: Right. Private buyers would come in. We built a sale ring. We'd cull out the animals we wanted to sell and a local auctioneer would come out and do the sale. We sold a cross section by sex and age; it was a very popular program and caught on very quickly.

Jerry: And this whole effort was to keep the animals down to the level that the range could support?

Bob: Right. Right, you just simply have to; you have a finite amount of feed and fence around your refuge and buffalo are quite prolific, so we just started a live-sell program with them. There had been a live sale program with longhorn cattle, they had taken them into town to the sale ring to do it, but we just did all that out of the refuge. That was a good job; it was a good community. We had two more boys born in Valentine, Nebraska

Jerry: So you're up to four boys now.

Bob: Chris was born in October of '65, and Scott was born in November of '66; so we had three of them that were all just a year apart and then the older boy, Ray. So June was a busy lady!

Jerry: Where was your next assignment, Bob?

Bob: From Valentine, from Fort Niobrara we moved to J. Clark Salyer Refuge, which had originally been named the Lower Souris Refuge in North Dakota. I absolutely couldn't believe this because I had gone to North Dakota in 1967 to pick up some vehicles. I went up there in the spring and the weather was awful. It was foggy and wet and I thought why in the hell would anybody ever want to live in North Dakota. But the thing I do reminder that every wetland had at least a pair of ducks on it, so that kind of made an impression on me.

Well, one day in 1968 while on vacation in Washington state, I got a call from Forrest Carpenter and he said that the Lower Souris, or the J. Clark Salyer Refuge, was opening up and he would like to see my name on the applicant list. And back in those days, I mean they had a green sheet but when Forrest Carpenter, Region 3 Refuge Supervisor, calls you and said he'd really like to see your application in there, you pretty well knew that if that application went in you were probably going to North Dakota. And I asked him, "You know, I don't know anything about ducks. I don't know anything about water management." He says, "Well, we've got people there that will help you out with that." He said, "I need somebody up there who can square away the grazing program and the land use programs." And so I put my name in because, well, for several reasons. Of course you always want to advance and I had a lot of respect for Forrest Carpenter, and if he called me and said he wanted to see my application, by golly you just did it; he was just that kind of guy.

Jerry: And this was going to be a promotion for you then to a 12?

Bob: Yeah, this was a promotion to GS-12.

Bob: So we moved to Upham, North Dakota in August of 1968. It had been an extremely dry summer. We lived on the refuge and shortly after I got there I went off to Madison, Wisconsin, for law enforcement refresher training. In those days it was just a week or so program. In the time I was gone there was a tremendous rainstorm in that area of North Dakota and it rained anywhere from five to ten inches. It really filled all the potholes. So it totally changed the complexion of what we were looking at. Every shallow wetland that had been planted to grain in the dry spring was now flooded and offered a perfect feast for waterfowl.

J. Clark Salyer was an interesting refuge. It is on the Souris River where it flows north into Canada, has five impoundments and a lot of your job is managing water. The biologist at that time, who had moved off the refuge and was an area biologist, was Merrill Hammond. He was another fellow who came into the service, graduate of Utah State University, and came into the Service probably in about 1937, and he had been refuge biologist there ever since. A wonderful person, extremely knowledgeable and one of these guys that retired with all that information in his head. I learned a lot from Merrill and he was a great help.

We had a very active farming program at Salyer. We got rid of a lot of the hay and grazing.

Jerry: Were these the issues that you were hired for?

Bob: Right. To deal with the extensive haying, the grazing, and the land use.

Jerry: What did that entail?

Bob: It entailed getting rid of permittees who were cutting hay on refuges every year on the meadows. Wild hay!

And we stopped some of that use and within a couple of years we saw Sandhill Cranes back there nesting.

Jerry: And you didn't get shot at?

Bob: No, I didn't get shot at but I got threatened. One guy was going to burn me out but that was the only death threat I ever got. He called up one night and threatened my life over the telephone to June, but I called the FBI the next day and they kind of had a chat with him. He was a little crazy and that was the thing that bothered me.

There were a couple of major floods on the Souris river when I was there in 1969 and then again in '71. There was a lot of repair work to do, it was an exciting time. We loved it there, the boys loved it; it was cold winters but there was snow. We just had a good time-- ice skating on the ponds, using the snowmobile to get around in the winter; it was just a great life.

Jerry: And that refuge was primarily waterfowl in the summer but you also mentioned Sandhill cranes, did you have any other upland game?

Bob: Primarily a waterfowl production area. We had white-fronted geese come in, a central flyway population of white-fronted geese came through there. Big concentrations of snow geese. Snow geese were just starting to move into central North Dakota from eastern North Dakota at that time. We had some Sandhill cranes, sharp-tailed grouse, pheasants and a good population of white tail deer that supported a hunting program. We had a very active fur management program with trappers trapping muskrat, fox, beaver, and mink on the refuge. We'd have a big sale every year where buyers would come in and that was quite an exciting time; it was very, very interesting work.

(Break in Tape)

Jerry: Okay. Now, go ahead.

Bob: We're talking about being at Salyer Refuge from 1968 to 1974. My supervisor out of Minneapolis, to start with was Ed Smith. Ed then moved from Minneapolis to Region 1 and John Carlson was my supervisor. And then I can't remember the year, but it was in the early '70's, the Fish and Wildlife Service went through a major change and we added another region. North Dakota was moved from Region 3 to Region 6.

Jerry: The new Denver Regional Office.

Bob: The new Denver office, right. And the state supervisor for North Dakota was Jim Gritman, and that made for some interesting changes. We not only changed regions but we changed financial accounting programs and went into this PPBE thing, what's that called?

Jerry: Program Planning?

Bob: Program, Planning, Budgeting and Evaluation, yeah! And so I got coerced into going around helping explain that to different refuge managers.

Jerry: And you did this from Souris?

Bob: Yes. There were some interesting times. Lake Darling on the Souris River north of Minot, North Dakota, was on Upper Souris Refuge. The Service controlled the water that came out of the dam and down the river through Minot. Also Des Lacs Refuge— with the Des Lacs River-- emptied into the Souris and that impacted Minot in those flood years. It was a very trying time for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Jim Gritman explained to folks what was mitigation for the channelization done on the Souris River through Minot, and what wasn't. They got a different version of the Fish and Wildlife Service than they had seen before when we took a little harder stand on issues and made our mark in that part of the country.

Jerry: Do you think it was a tougher position for the Fish and Wildlife?

Bob: Yes I do.

Jerry: Tougher to benefit conservation?

Bob: Beneficial to conservation, you bet. There's always a lot of issues in North Dakota. The Garrison Diversion Project was underway and the Fish and Wildlife Service supported that. I was president of the North Dakota chapter of The Wildlife Society that opposed the Garrison Diversion Project so that put me in kind of an interesting position at times. North Dakota was an exciting place to work. If you were interested in managing waterfowl, boy that was the place to be. The Jamestown Research Center was going real heavy; Harvey Nelson was running it at that time. We used to go down there every month for seminars. We had lots of contact with the research people, Arnie Cruse was working out of there, as was Leo Kirsch. Harvey Miller was another great fellow: and names that

some people might not remember like Glenn Sherwood, who quit the Fish and Wildlife Service on a matter of principle. Dr. Gary Pierson, was a very controversial veterinarian working there, so it was just an exciting time. There was a lot going on and we were doing great research and management with waterfowl and heavily involved with the Garrison Diversion Project; North Dakota was a very exciting place to work.

Jerry: And you were doing this as a project leader GS-12 at the time.

Bob: GS-12, right!

Jerry: Where after that Bob?

Bob: I had kind of wanted to get back west at some time and so when Klamath Basin opened up in 1974, I applied for it. That was a promotion to a GS-13. I moved as the Refuge Manager of Klamath Basin NWR Complex, a group of 6 NWR's, on about the first of September of 1974, and I was there until February 1st of 1986.

Jerry: That was a pretty long stint in those days at one place for a Refuge Manager wasn't' it?

Bob: Yeah, and I have the record for tenure at Klamath Basin. I don't know whether that says something about me or says something about other folk, but I was there a little over 11 ½ years and at a very challenging time.

Jerry: What was the focus of your efforts, Bob, what were the issues that you were having to address down there?

Bob: Well mostly it was dealing with the Bureau of Reclamation, the local Irrigation Districts, and the farmers who leased land on Tule Lake Refuge and on Lower Klamath Refuge.

Jerry: That was 1974 you're talking about?

Bob: That's 1974.

Jerry: How has that changed in 2004?

Bob: The main thing that changed in 2004 is a couple of fish species, the suckers in Upper Klamath Lake and Coho salmon in the Klamath River, have been listed as endangered and it greatly affects the amount of water that's available. The water rights at Klamath Basin are pretty tenuous; the refuges don't have the water rights, so essentially you had to negotiate with the Bureau of Reclamation, work with the Irrigation Districts every year. I followed Bob Watson in there. I'd known Bob, he was manager at Hart Mountain in 1958 when I went to work. But Bob, God rest his soul, didn't have a real good working relationship with the local Irrigation Districts and the Bureau of Reclamation. And it didn't take me very long to figure out that we had all the marshes and the Bureau of Reclamation had all the water, and if you wanted water in your marshes you developed a working relationship with the Bureau of Reclamation. So I put a lot of effort into that and I take pride in the fact that I was very successful. I worked with three different project managers at the Klamath Project, different managers with the Irrigation Districts.

I made it my job to learn as much about the Basin as I could; the history of it, who the people were, why they we're there, what were the contracts like for all the water that was allocated to the district. I just figured I had to know as much as I could about how that place operated, how farmers thought. I had to know what the markets were, what potatoes were selling for, what grain was worth, what was happening as far as the weather was doing, when they could harvest and when they couldn't. You know those kinds of things served me very well in being able to deal with the Bureau of Reclamation, with the Irrigation Districts and with the farmers to get some things changed on the refuge. We got rid of a lot of grazing programs, we worked with the Bureau of Reclamation in converting some of the lease land back into uplands or wetlands.

We got power lines put underground on Tule Lake refuge so birds didn't fly into them. A big controversy we faced was Pacific Power wanted to build a 500 KV line right across the north edge of Lower Klamath Refuge. I got involved with a guy by the name of Tom Roster, who was an independent researcher who did a lot of work with shotgun ballistics. He knew about the heights that birds fly in the Lower Klamath Lake area. The issue went through the Public Utilities Commissions in the state of Oregon and that line got rerouted so that it didn't cross right adjacent to the refuge. That was a tremendously controversial thing.

Jerry: But it was the right thing to do?

Bob: It was the right thing to do. You don't see a big 500 KV line, or two of them, going right across the north edge of the refuge or out across the lower lake area. It now goes up along the highway corridors and cuts through south of

the town of Klamath Falls where it should go, where it doesn't affect wildlife.

The other big controversy that we faced was the establishment of Bear Valley Refuge. Bear Valley is a bald eagle night roosting area that lies just west of Highway 97, south of Klamath Falls. This area had been under study by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Nature Conservancy to try to acquire this area as a roost site for bald eagles. Well one of the owners was an 87-year-old widow, who was a native of Klamath Basin. A timber company talked her into selling them the trees and then she could sell the land to the Fish and Wildlife Service. And, I believe it was in either '78 or '79, the federal Government went to court and got a taking order and, what's the word I'm looking for…

Jerry: Condemned?

Bob: …condemned her land that day with the trees on it, the day before the timber company was to start harvesting. So you could imagine what that sounded like in the local press. The importance of the timber in this issue was as a Bald eagle roosting sites. And it was right on the edge of the core area for the eagles, so this created tremendous amount of controversy, but we got through that.

Jerry: Did she get a fair deal?

Bob: Oh yeah, she got a fair deal, certainly did. She went to court, of course. In the condemnation suit, the Government had it's appraiser and landowner had an appraiser and it went to court for a determination; she was well paid. The refuge was finally established at about 4500 acres by bringing in some BLM land, some state land, buying some other private land from Weyerhaeuser, Inc. and others. It protected an extremely important bald eagle roosting area. And that was the impetus for starting the Bald Eagle Conference in 1979 in Klamath Falls. In 2004, it will be the 25th Anniversary of that conference.

We also did some major changes in the hunting program the first year I was there. My assistant manager was Homer McCullum, and he had just transferred in at the same time I did. We were sitting on A Dike on Tule Lake Refuge one day watching hunters blaze away at the geese trying to fly out in the afternoon. As we were sitting there I said to Homer, "There's got to be a better way to do this." And he says, "There is." And I said, "You know how to do it?" He says, "You bet." I said, "Well let's do it." And so he designed a space blind hunting program. We put restrictions on the number of hunters every day on a permit system, more severe than it had been. We closed some areas along the highway and instituted something that I'd seen work in North Dakota and that's stop hunting at 1:00 in the afternoon to give the birds a rest. You'd thought we'd invaded Russia, and China, and North Korea all at the same time for the stir it caused, but you know you just ride it out. It was a whole lot easier to do things back then, than it is now. We got the approval of the Regional Office, went to public meetings and worked with people and implemented the program, and it was accepted and still in place, and that was a great achievement.

Jerry: Let's pick up on what were the things now that would complicate doing what you just did. You said public meetings, that was a big change from early on when the Government just kind of went in there and said, "Hey I'm from the government and Fish and Wildlife Service and I know what I'm doing." And you make a decision and give it to them. Then we went into the era of public meetings. What were the things now that would have complicated what you just did?

Bob: Well, we were in kind of a transition between what you described of the Fish and Wildlife Service just coming up with something and telling everybody. But that's kind of how we did it.

We did go to places like Mt. Shasta, California. I remember going all the way down to meetings in San Diego because there were hunters that came from all over the state of California. Well, now you'd have to do an environmental impact assessment at least, you'd be obligated to go through a whole analysis of alternatives, there would have been a lot more input probably from the environmental community, not that that's bad; just pointing out the differences in the mid 1970's.

Jerry: And probably publish a Public Register Notice about your decision?

Bob: That's right. And back in those days we just considered public programs like that to be the prerogative of the Refuge Manager to administer. And of course if you didn't do it right, you'd be out of there. And it was a couple of rocky years but the hunters accepted and the program has stayed. But that paled in comparison to the steel shot controversy because the use of steel shot was ordered to be implemented.

I think I've got the years right but in 1977 and 1978, we, with the help of Tom Roster, designed and implemented a program to test the lethality of steel shot in the field. It's what's called a double blind experiment. We had the space blind area, hunters would sign up to go into the space blinds. They would be given the shot to use, it would either be steel shot or lead shot and they didn't know which it was. They would be accompanied by an observer, temporary hires that we had. And these young folks would go out with a range finder, optical range finder, and measure the height at which these birds were hit, record how many were killed and then this would be tallied as to whether it was steel shot or lead shot and the hunter didn't know. And so that was one of the first major tests of steel shot on a refuge. The bottom line was it showed that in the hands of a good hunter, somebody who knew how to shoot, steel shot was as effective as lead shot in killing birds. The biggest variable is the person behind the gun, not what's put in the gun. So we did that for two years and interestingly a lot of people that worked on that program are still in the Fish and Wildlife Service in different roles. I think of Dave Mauser, who's now the biologist down at Klamath Basin Refuge, got his start there and a lot of other people that are still with the Service.

Jerry: What other issues did you have? You had water issues so far, we've got change in the hunting program, we've got the lead shot/steel shot issue?

Bob: The Bureau of Reclamation was getting rid of some surplus land. A big outcropping in the Tule Lake Basin called The Peninsula came up and the Bureau of Land Management made a run to get it. But the Fish and Wildlife Service got it put under our administration as part of Tule Lake Refuge. It had been overrun by off-road vehicles and motorcycles but we took it under our administration and stopped that use. One of my assistant managers at the time was Richard Voss, who is now the manager up at Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. He was a very effective law enforcement person and he worked a lot on that. Paul Benvenuti was another one of my assistant managers who was a very, very effective law enforcement person. Mike Vivion who's now at Kodiak as a pilot/biologist, worked for me at Klamath Basin.

Jerry: You had a bunch going through there. It was about this time that you ended up coming to Portland, did you not? As a supervisor?

Bob: Yes! I moved to Portland in February of 1986. I came up as the refuge supervisor for California. There were three refuge supervisors in the office at that time; Jack Wadell, Sandy Wilbur and myself, The Service went through another reorganization and I can't remember what this one was called, been through too many of them to remember their names, but it was probably in, probably about 1987 or '88. And they reduced staffing down to two refuge supervisors so I was given the responsibility then for California and Nevada.

Jerry: But not Klamath Basin?

Bob: No, I did have Klamath Basin. Klamath Basin was part of the California operation. So I was in the position of supervising an area that I had just left, and that's, not the best thing in the world. You have to really approach that with a lot of understanding and a lot of temperance because you tend to think that since you were there for almost 12 years you knew everything in the world, but you don't. But you also had to realize that you weren't the manager there anymore, that somebody else was the manager. Roger Johnston replaced me as manager and my job was to supervise the area, to provide guidance, work with the budgetary things and just oversee the general operation

Jerry: Provide the resources?

Bob: Provide the resources that they got and oversee the general conformity to policies and stuff.

Jerry: Did you like that job in Portland?

Bob: I did, I liked it…

Jerry: Did you get a GS-14 out of that?

Bob: I was a 14, from the reorganization. When I moved to Portland, it was a lateral at GS-13.

Jerry: I think they were called Division Managers then.

[Break in tape]

Bob: Yes! I spent about half my time in the office. During the time that I was in there I had three great assistants, four actually, over the time. Started out with Dave Brown, then Forrest Cameron, then Mike Nunn, and then Linda Watters. All of them are just super people. But I was out in the field about half the time. It was kind of tough because California is a long ways away from Portland. You recognize that from having to work with fisheries issues in California. Larry Debates retired and

John Doebel came in. John, of course, had different ways of looking at things at the time but a very effective way. We worked quite well together. But it was fun going out in the field working with managers. When I was supervisor of California/ Nevada refuges, I had the best crop of refuge managers that anybody could have. You know you go down to Sacramento Refuge there was Gary Kramer, over to San Francisco Bay there was Rick Coleman, go down to San Luis Complex with Gary Zahm, go down to Salton Sea later on it was Clark Bloom; he'd been up at Modoc. Tom Charmley was down at Kern. Tom was a great guy, he looked at things a little differently than others but an extremely effective person at getting water for Kern, which was the life blood of that area. Roger Johnson was up at Klamath and Marc Weitzel was at Tijuana Slough and then headed up the California Condor re-introduction program for the Service.

Jerry: You had one over in Nevada too.

Bob: Oh Dave Brown moved down to the Desert Wildlife Refuge.

Jerry: Okay and then you had the one at Fallon.

Bob: Ron Anglin was at Stillwater Refuge, and Dan Pennington was at Ruby Lake so it was a very interesting group of people to work with.

Jerry: This is a big step up for you from looking at Klamath Basin, which is a major refuge, but you're looking at California and its politics. What were some of the things that really were pushing the Service and pushing this refuge program at that time?

Bob: Well the first thing that really I had to deal with when I got to Portland was the Kesterson issue with the selenium poisoning of waterfowl at Kesterson. Gary Zahm had been very instrumental, along with Felix Smith out of the Sacramento ES office, in pointing out the plight of these birds at Kesterson. Kesterson was a dead end sump where agriculture drainage water flowed into the refuge. There was no outlet and the selenium concentrated in the sediments and in the water. Birds took up the selenium and resulted in deformed ducks and coots and frogs and everything else and it got to be *extremely* political.

But the bottom line was that Kesterson Refuge got closed primarily by an opinion that was written by Don Berry, who was working in the solicitor's office at that time, and that was *huge* political move to close that National Wildlife Refuge. And Bureau of Reclamation had to fill it in, cover it up, cap it off, and find other ways to handle that drain water and it really just rocketed refuges and wildlife onto the front page in California. And at that same time we were dealing with putting together information for the reauthorization of the Central Valley Project. All state and federal refuges determined what their water needs were at three different levels and this information went into a major report and legislation was formulated. The Central Valley Project in California was reauthorized and water for the state and federal areas was made a purpose of the project. And this was another major milestone that was accomplished; this was signed by the first President Bush, it was a Republican administration, but it was the right thing to do.

It was the CVPIA, *Central Valley Project Improvement Act.* And then the Region set up an office in Sacramento to start working with it. A fellow who worked for me and refuges was Joel Miller, he worked on that. Jim McKevitt in ES was involved with that, a lot of other folks were, but it was a major undertaking. But it did bring refuges and wildlife to the forefront and people recognized it. You knew they were part of the California scene just like agriculture and municipal uses were too.

Jerry: And you're talking about an area that's important to wildlife, to the Pacific flyaway, when you've got as many waterfowl that come through Klamath and Sacramento and end up in the lower Central Valley.

Bob: There had been major changes taking place in the Central Valley. The National Audubon Society, California Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited, all had programs to benefit wintering waterfowl after the CVPIA came into being. It just coincided with a major move of these organizations to protect habitat, to design ways to improve wintering habitat. Where water was made available to rice farmers, payments were made if they would keep their land flooded for habitat, just all kinds of things. Major activities up in the Butte Sink area by Audubon and Ducks Unlimited put millions of dollars into habitat improvement on state and federal areas. We ratcheted up the Private Lands Program and the Easement Program. The Private Lands Program was where federal cost-share money was made available in improvement of habitat and it had major, major changes in the Central Valley California.

Jerry: And you were all part of that, that led right up to the time you retired?

Bob: Yeah all those things were going on and I retired in January of 1995. I wasn't going to retire that soon but the Government had a buyout program and they offered a $25,000 bonus. The only thing that Fish and Wildlife Service didn't realize was that my price was a hell of a lot cheaper than that, but I took it and left. I always wanted to leave the Fish and Wildlife Service on an upbeat note. I didn't want to go out as a sour, disgruntled employee. I didn't want to go through another reorganization. I was glad when I left. They were going into another reorganization at that time; I would have found it very, very difficult to work under it so I was just pleased to leave.

I had an enjoyable career, I think I accomplished a lot; I had a lot of personal satisfaction. I had a wonderful family that supported me all throughout; we raised four boys on refuges and they will never forget those experiences they had. And my wife, June, was just at my side all the time, she was a great supporter, she was a great host to anybody that visited the refuge and ate a meal with June. She was the person I came home to and I would bounce things off of her and the guidance that she would give me, on management and personnel matters; I took it seriously and she just wasn't wrong.

Jerry: That's interesting you left with a good upbeat. Looking back, what are some of the things that you think that really strike you as giving you just a good feeling that you really felt you had the success.

Bob: The thing that really gave you the opportunity to do things was the attitude of your supervisor, and I worked for some great people. I worked for Forrest Carpenter and Ed Smith who gave me the opportunity to make those changes in the buffalo and longhorn disposal programs at Fort Niobrara Refuge. I worked, again, for Forrest and then Jim Gritman where we made changes in the Land Use Program, where we could enforce easements, and you had the freedom and the support of those supervisors to go out and the confidence that I would do the right thing. That was always, that was the most important thing to me. When I came to Klamath Basin, Kahler Martinson was the Regional Director and Larry Debates was the Refuge Supervisor. We made some major changes with those hunting programs, the work we did with the relocation of the power lines, the controversies over Bear Valley and stuff, they essentially provided me the help. But they didn't call all the shots and that is extremely important for managers to be able to do. When you're the local Fish and Wildlife Service representative in the community, you have to have the authority to do what you need to do and local people respect that. That was the thing that let me get so much accomplished. I did get it done because the supervisors I worked for had the confidence in me. We'd work it out, we'd agree on a program and we'd go ahead and do it. And now-a-days I see so many managers disgruntled because of the political issues that come up, there's too many people involved. It's a nightmare to try and get anything accomplished. It takes so long, there's so many procedures to go through and I see a real decrease in the public's acceptance of the professionalism of wildlife biologists and managers and I think that's a real tragedy. It's not only in the Fish and Wildlife Service. I see it in the U.S. Forest Service and their inability to manage forest lands, the Bureau of Land Management and all the controversies they face. The state people have the same problems.

Jerry: This sounds like this is a major change for a young man starting out with a 30-year career and ending up being able to do things then seeing this, sounds like this is a major trend that you've seen in conservation management.

Bob: Yes it is and I'm glad I was in the time I was; I'm really glad. Most of us that worked in the Service, we were farm kids, we grew up hunting and fishing and packing a .22 around all the time when you were out, and you lived in rural communities. I shot a lot of things with a .22 and some I'll admit to and some I won't, but on the whole, our country's changing. A lot of the people coming into the conversation work now are, well as most people are, they're from an urban environment. They grew up in the cities, they're attracted to the work for a variety of different reasons and I'm not saying our way was better, but it was more enjoyable because we were more involved in management. We had the flexibility to get things accomplished, maybe they weren't always right but we were not tied up with endless paperwork and frustration over inability to get things done. So I enjoyed my career, I wouldn't trade it for anything. If I were to look back and do it over, the only thing I would do is I would do some of the things I did better and smarter.

Jerry: Would you, and is there a thing you felt that you left undone or wish you had done when you look back? That had you known then what you know now?

Bob: Yeah, I think I could have accomplished more at Klamath. When I was there, we negotiated water deliveries every year because there was usually adequate water, but I would have made a major move to firm that up.

If only I had had insight as to what was coming down the line with the listing of endangered species which really put the clamps on Klamath Basin Refuges. To me it's really distressing to see everything in the Klamath Basin talked about except refuges. You don't see refuges, water supply for refuges being an important aspect of what the Service deals with.

Jerry: But overall, from your time and your experience with the Fish and Wildlife Service and this refuge system, you think the refuges are better off today or the Fish and Wildlife Service is better off today or different?

Bob: Well I think it's both, I thinks it's different and I think they're better off, they're better off because they're bigger, they've got more money to do things, more areas, got a greater variety of people, greater variety of programs.

Jerry: And the holdings in the Refuge system play a more vital and more important role than they once did.

Bob: Right, but I also have the belief that this refuge system keeps growing and expanding, that one day it's going to be big enough to be its own Service within the Department of Interior. I don't think that's out of the realm of possibility that people should be looking at that. And some day you're going to look at the National Wildlife Refuge Service and the other aspects of the Fish and Wildlife Service will form the rest of it. I think some major changes can be made by reinstating a Fish and Wildlife Service Research Branch, that all the endangered species work that the Federal Government does ought to come under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, anadromous fish and everything. It should be split between National Wildlife Refuge System and the rest of the Service activities. And I think that those two things could be split and we'd have a very strong program both ways; there's so much work to be done.

Jerry: Would you recommend to a young person now considering conversation or wildlife management, that this would be a field for one to enter into?

Bob: Yes, I would never discourage anybody from doing it. There's always lots of opportunity, different opportunities than when I came in.

Jerry: But it's still a rewarding career.

Bob: Still a rewarding career. It's more specialized, requires more academic training, harder to get into the main stream and to advance and get permanent position and stuff, but that's the way business is done in every federal agency now-a-days, it's just a way of doing business. I would never discourage anybody from doing it. Fish and Wildlife Service is the best agency in the country to work for, hands down.

Jerry: Hey that's a good, I happen to agree with that.

Bob lets wind down here. Is there a story, you know there's a lot of things that happen with people in their career, if you were to relay a story that really tickled your funny bone or series of incidents, this is the time that you can tell a story on a colleague or an incident that you know should be remembered as to how things went. It wasn't all drudgery, that there were some fun things or good stories, do you have one that comes to mind?

(Break in tape)

Bob: I remember one day at Tule Lake, Homer McCulliam and I were in an airboat and Homer was driving and I was sitting up front. We were coming up a narrow channel and turned the corner and didn't seem to quite make it and the airboat sank in the water. As airboats have a way of doing, it kind of skidded up on the bank and then slid back into the water and I remember, distinctly remember, my camera bag, which was a little ole military bag that had my cameras in it, just kind of floating there and I just picked it up and stepped out of the boat. I think Homer said something like, "Oh sh*t!" or something closely related to that. But there was just lots of things, getting snow mobiles stuck in North Dakota with Rod King and Jerry Updike.

Another incident happened at Fort Niobrara. Ed Smith was there watching the roundup and sorting of buffalo for sale. We were standing on the catwalk at the corrals and I had a small cattle whip in my hand. I whacked at an animal but my aim was not good and I caught the back of Ed's hand. He never let me forget that. Whenever I would see him he would gently rub the back of his hand to remind me. He had a great sense of humor.

Jerry: That doesn't sound like it be funny, a North Dakota snow mobile being stuck sounds life threatening or dangerous.

Bob: Well yeah I guess it was, as was banding white fronted geese at night with Harvey Miller out of Jamestown and trying not to get run over by the airboat

when you were jumping out to catch geese; there's just story after story. Marv Kaschke, Bob Burkholder and I driving along one day out on the breaks of the Missouri River in the dead of winter. Of course you couldn't follow the road because they were all snowed in, so we're going down a ridge top and just yakking and getting ready to come back in for the evening and all of a sudden the 4-wheel drive broke through the snow we were driving on. We thought it was a couple inches deep but we had driven out on a drift and were about 4 feet above the ground with a 4-wheel drive sitting there, nobody to help you.

Jerry: And before the days of cell phones.

Bob: Yeah, and I remember flying with Bob Burkholder in a super cub doing census work there at CMR and just having to pee so bad you just couldn't stand it. So he lands on a frozen pond, a pond with a L-shape. He didn't make the L-curve and thumps into the snow bank at the end and tipped the plane. It didn't bend the prop too bad so we could fly off. You know there's just story after story like that, it was just a great life.

Jerry: You'd been known as a photographer, I mean a legacy.

Bob: Well yeah I did a lot of photography, left a lot of pictures at refuges. I think that was a great way to tell people about wildlife. I had an opportunity to work with some wonderful photographers over the years, especially Tupper Blake and Frans Lanting down at Klamath Basin.

You know the thing I was most proud of and the thing that I think I was probably good at was just developing people under me. I always had a philosophy that you should be training your assistant managers to replace you. I take a lot of pride in the fact that the people I worked with that I see now, are in real leadership roles in the Fish and Wildlife Service. Al Trout, the manager over at Bear River and one of the most successful managers that there is going. John Martin started for me in Valentine, Nebraska ended up as manager of the Alaska Maritime Refuges, he's now also very active with the National Wildlife Refuge Association; John is a highly respected person. Jerry Updike who went on to be assistant manager at Crab Orchard and then went to Project Leader at the new Walnut Creek refuge. Richard Voss is now the manager up at Arctic Refuge in Alaska. It is especially gratifying to have Ron Cole as Manager at Klamath Basin. He started at Klamath in the 80's as a junior biologist, moved up to a Project Leader in Minnesota, and then as Refuge Supervisor in Denver. I had a role in working with those people and it's a great satisfaction to me to see the people that I worked with to move on to very responsible positions. That to me is one of the most gratifying aspects of my work.

Another thing that I have a real feeling for is I think that we see far too few people in the Fish and Wildlife Service, particularly refuges, involved in their professional organizations. I was very active in the Wildlife Society, was president of the North Dakota Chapter, president of the Western Section and have been a member of the Wildlife Society since 1956. And I think that there is a great deal for us to learn, being associated with these professional organizations and being active in them. Not only do you learn many things but a lot of people learn a lot about refuges and what it takes to manage refuges, and problems we face. That's one of the best places to do it. And then after I retire, I've become active in working with the National Wildlife Refuge Association, and on the board of directors with the Portland Audubon Society.

Jerry: You're on the board of directors for them?

Bob: Board of Directors for Portland Audubon. I just feel that I have something to contribute to these organizations that will help the refuge system and the Fish and Wildlife Service. And I think that's important. I don't think you can just walk away from 37 years of work and not continue to contribute.

Jerry: And I think, Bob, that's a good note to end on and thank you very much for your time.